



# Jessica Schear '01

## All Hail the Queen of Medieval Times

INTERVIEW BY ADAM DURSO

Actress Jessica Schear traded Off-Broadway venues for an arena that can seat over 1,000 people when she joined the cast of *Medieval Times* in Lyndhurst, New Jersey. Every time Schear dons the crown of Queen Maria Isabella, the show's leading lady, she channels an even-handed, tough and independent ruler who has won the hearts of patrons young and old. The dinner theater famous for extravagant costumes and jousting knights made headlines when it announced the arrival of its new monarch. After 34 years with a king on the throne, it was time for a change.

**Can you describe your career?**

I booked two national theater tours after I graduated with a communications major and a theater minor. Later, I took workshops at the Stella Ather Conservatory and HB Studios. I did several Off-Broadway shows while working as a makeup artist, which I still do. I've worked in reality casting for shows like "Top Chef" and "CHOPPED," but acting is my passion. When a friend told me they were looking for a *Medieval Times* princess, I thought it would be fun, so I auditioned.

**How did you become cast as queen?**

I started working there about 6½ years ago, in the role of Princess Catalina. She didn't say much and was more or less a prop. That show ran about four years before the company decided to change the dynamic from king to

queen. The decision was made literally overnight. The princesses weren't guaranteed the part; we had to audition.

**The queen has been popular?**

Given the current social climate, the rise of #Me-Too and other movements, we knew the show would have a big impact and get a lot of press. *Vogue* ran stories about the queens for international women's day in 2018, and we were featured on "The Tonight Show" this past fall. Jimmy Fallon and his musical guest, Post Malone, came to Lyndhurst and did a skit pretending to be knights jousting.

**Is it important to see a woman in charge?**

Seeing a woman come out on horseback and deliver these lines is empowering for young girls. Many come up to me after the show, hug me and tell me that they are really glad I'm in charge now. I have a 2-year-old daughter, and I look forward to taking her to the show when she's old enough. Boys really like the queen, too. She presents them with a woman in a position of leadership and shows them how women should be treated.

**What is the show's storyline?**

Queen Maria Isabella is holding a tournament, the first since the passing of her father, the king. She's still finding her way as a queen. She's alone, so naturally her chancellor keeps advising her to get married, which she rejects. The games commence, and eventually an irate knight speaks out of turn and tells her chancellor that she doesn't belong on the throne. Then, the drama really unfolds.

**What's the queen like?**

She is friendly and polite, loves the people in her kingdom, but hates being talked down to. She's wise and can read people.

There is definitely an edge to her that comes out at times, but she remembers that as a queen, she has to be composed.

**How did you prepare for the role?**

First, I had to learn how to ride a horse. Then I watched every movie about queens and female sovereigns I could find. I like observing how other actresses present themselves as monarchs, especially Cate Blanchett in the movie "Elizabeth."

**How many performances do you do?**

In our busy season, we may do 9-10 shows per week, of which I'm in 4-5. Sometimes we do 3 in a day.

**What's your favorite aspect of this role?**

Each actress plays Queen Isabella a bit differently, though I'd say I play her the edgiest. On a certain night I might feel a bit sassy, and as an actress, I'll channel that. I have a very "Game-of-Thrones"-like exchange with the knight who questions my legitimacy. I deliver one of my favorite lines—"Well within my royal command is it to have you slain where you stand"—and then choose a champion to fight him.

**Your biggest challenge?**

I have to mount and dismount a horse in front of a large crowd while looking graceful in a long dress. Guests are encouraged to cheer for their knights, and it's challenging to deliver your lines in a medieval dialect while they are shouting. Anything can happen, especially when you're dealing with live animals, but it's a blast.

**What do you remember from Quinnipiac that prepared you?**

Lee Soroko, a former theater professor who cast me in "The House of Bernarda Alba," would say: "How you rehearse is how you perform." I hear his voice in my head to this day.